

**Testimony Before the Committee on Higher Education and Employment Advancement**

**Re: HB 6403: AN ACT REQUIRING LEGISLATIVE APPROVAL FOR THE MERGER OR CLOSING OF INSTITUTIONS WITHIN THE CONNECTICUT STATE COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES *and***

**HB 5545: AN ACT CONCERNING THE BUDGET OF THE CONNECTICUT STATE COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES**

**Submitted by Stephen Adair, Ph.D., Professor of Sociology, Central Connecticut State University, Resident of Bloomfield, CT**

**March 9, 2021**

Senator Haskell, Representative Elliott, Senator Witkos, Representative Haines, and Members of the Committee, my name is Stephen Adair. I am a Professor of Sociology at Central Connecticut State University, and recently completed 8 years of service on the Faculty Advisory Committee and five years as a non-voting, faculty representative on the BOR.

I recommend passage of House Bill 6403, which requires legislative approval for the merger or closing of institutions within the CSCU system, and HB 5545, which concerns the budget of the CSCU system office. The community colleges are public assets that belong to Connecticut's citizens for the benefit of its citizens and its communities. We need our public, higher education institutions to be accountable to the public interest. We need you to hold them accountable.

The community college consolidation plan referred to by the name "Students First" promises to save \$24 million annually by cutting deeply into what were already deemed unsustainable, austerity budgets, while improving graduation and retention rates, growing enrollments, and closing the racial achievement gap in the state. If that seems too good to be true, that is because it probably is.

Meeting these goals will require a centralized administration in New Britain to direct, monitor, and administer over 200 degree programs and certificates across 12 satellite campuses, without direct contact with the students in these programs and the faculty that teach them.

The plan is still years away from completion, but it is clear at this point that the "Students First" plan does not fund students first. The consolidation has already cost some tens of millions of dollars to build the administration for the new college with more spending to come. The size of the state's investment in the consolidation is partially obscured by the way the system office is funded, which is by withholding a portion of the block grant from the state universities and the community colleges. To implement the consolidation without the unfettered ability to appropriate revenues for itself in this way, the system office would have had to come before you and the appropriations committee to alter the direction of expenditures and to justify the state investment. These actions would have made the cost of the consolidation much more visible to you and to the Connecticut taxpayer.

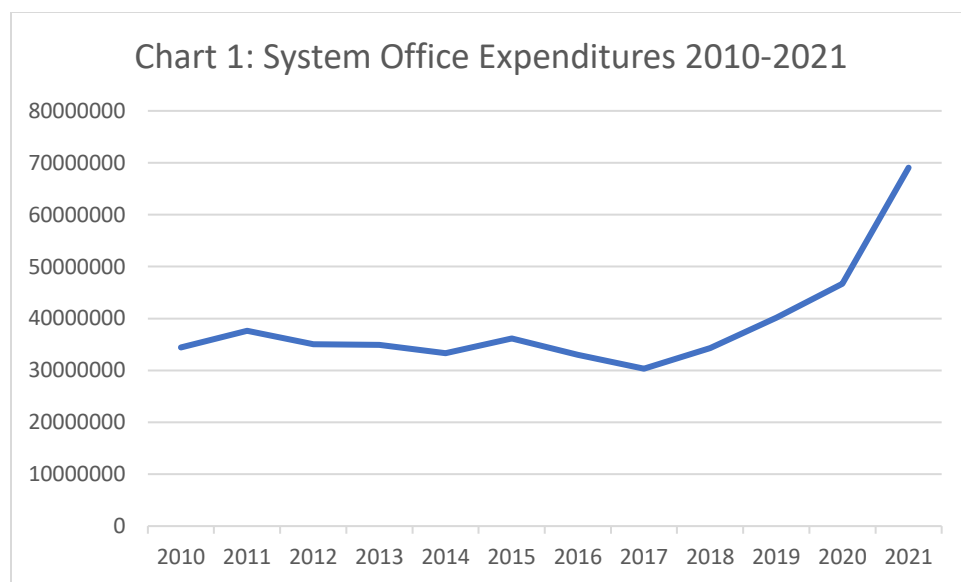
Since the announcement of the plan in 2017, the yearly system office expenses have ballooned from \$30.3 million to a budgeted \$69.1 million for FY 2021. Chart 1 illustrates the modest decreases in system office expenditures after the merger in 2011, and the abrupt change in 2017. The increase in system office expenditures alone would easily have funded debt-free college for all community college students.

Table 1 illustrates the diversion of revenue to the system office from the colleges where the students are. Overall, the total expenditures for the community colleges increased by 10.56 percent from 2017 2020, but the community college portion of the system office budget (CCC SO) increased by 127.6 percent. When the fringe benefit costs are removed from the total expenditures, we see that most of the colleges have experienced actual declines, while the system office has increased by 125 percent.

The cumulative increase in the cost of the system office since 2017 is \$69 million. Some fraction of this has gone to the delivery of shared services in IT and HR, but a larger portion has gone to implement the transition and to fund the new administration.

In the agenda for the October 2020 BOR meeting, a roster of appointments for the new college identifies 83 positions for the new college that have already been filled. The system office points out that many of the people hired into these positions have come from people already inside the system. This is true, but for most of them, their work has been repurposed toward the building of this one college. Many have also already received significant raises (See Table 2).

I close with two recommends to the merger bill (HB 6403). The language states that if the legislature does not act within one year, a proposed merger or closure be deemed approved. I recommend changing that to not approved. Further, I recommend adding the clause, “that the BOR shall not seek regional accreditation for a merger that has not been approved by the general assembly.”



**Table 1. Changes in total budget expenditures from 2017 to 2021 (all numbers are in 1000s of dollars)**

| Institution | Total Expenditures FY 2021* | Total Expenditures FY 2017** | Difference 2021-2017 | Percentage change since 2017 | Fringe cost FY 2021* | Fringe cost FY 2017** | Total exp. Less fringe FY 2021 | Total exp. Less fringe FY 2017 | Diff in exp. 2021-2017 less fringe | Percent change since 2017 |
|-------------|-----------------------------|------------------------------|----------------------|------------------------------|----------------------|-----------------------|--------------------------------|--------------------------------|------------------------------------|---------------------------|
| ACC         | 19,901                      | 19,326                       | 575                  | 2.98                         | 7,359                | 6,362                 | 12,542                         | 12,964                         | -422                               | -3.26                     |
| CCC         | 37,275                      | 32,686                       | 4,589                | 14.04                        | 13,181               | 10,181                | 24,094                         | 22,505                         | 1,589                              | 7.06                      |
| GCC         | 63,867                      | 60,517                       | 3,350                | 5.54                         | 21,443               | 18,383                | 42,424                         | 42,134                         | 290                                | 0.69                      |
| HCC         | 45,060                      | 41,524                       | 3,536                | 8.52                         | 15,414               | 11,800                | 29,646                         | 29,724                         | -78                                | -0.26                     |
| MCC         | 52,925                      | 55,028                       | -2,103               | -3.82                        | 20,499               | 18,315                | 32,426                         | 36,713                         | -4,287                             | -11.68                    |
| MXCC        | 25,665                      | 24,472                       | 1,193                | 4.87                         | 8,932                | 7,249                 | 16,733                         | 17,223                         | -490                               | -2.85                     |
| NVCC        | 58,937                      | 58,656                       | 281                  | 0.48                         | 22,563               | 19,910                | 36,374                         | 38,746                         | -2,372                             | -6.12                     |
| NWCC        | 16,535                      | 16,240                       | 295                  | 1.82                         | 6,176                | 5,541                 | 10,359                         | 10,699                         | -340                               | -3.18                     |
| NCC         | 49,776                      | 49,151                       | 625                  | 1.27                         | 15,753               | 14,310                | 34,023                         | 34,841                         | -818                               | -2.35                     |
| QVCC        | 16,647                      | 16,695                       | -48                  | -0.29                        | 5,992                | 5,151                 | 10,655                         | 11,544                         | -889                               | -7.70                     |
| TRCC        | 36,560                      | 33,478                       | 3,082                | 9.21                         | 12,379               | 10,554                | 24,181                         | 22,924                         | 1,257                              | 5.48                      |
| TXCC        | 37,092                      | 34,719                       | 2,373                | 6.83                         | 13,225               | 11,541                | 23,867                         | 23,178                         | 689                                | 2.97                      |
| CCC SO      | 56,328                      | 24,749                       | 31,579               | 127.60                       | 13,604               | 5,792                 | 42,724                         | 18,957                         | 23,767                             | 125.37                    |
| Totals      | 516,568                     | 467,241                      | 49,327               | 10.56                        | 176,520              | 145,089               | 340,048                        | 322,152                        | 17,896                             | 5.56                      |

\*Source: Attachment A of Revised 2021 Budget of Oct. 7, 2020, BOR Finance Committee, available at <https://www.ct.edu/images/uploads/Finance-Agenda-10-07-2020.pdf?60608>

\*\*Source: Attachment A of Sept. 6. 2017 BOR finance committee agenda, available at <http://www.ct.edu/images/uploads/Finance - Agenda - 09-06-2017.pdf?95522>.

**Table 2: Salaries of Recent Employees in 2018 and 2020 That Have Been Added to the System Office From Inside the System in the Last Two Years**

|                         | <b>2018</b> |      | <b>2020</b> | <b>Title at System Office</b>                        |
|-------------------------|-------------|------|-------------|--|
| Greg DeSantis           | 76,053      | HCC  | 130,928     | VP of Student Success and Academic Initiatives       |
| Mike Buccilli           | 89,829      | GCC  | 134,550     | Assoc VP for Student Success Management              |
| Francine Roselli-Navara | 80,199      | MCC  | 135,824     | Interim Assoc VP of Academic Programs and Curr.      |
| James Lombella          | 175,706     | ACC  | 235,062     | Regional President                                   |
| Gayle Barrett           | 82,073      | MxCC | 134,550     | Assoc VP for Enrollment and Retention Services       |
| Tamika Davis            | 73,003      | TxCC | 134,550     | Assoc VP for Recruitment, Admissions and Comm.       |
| Ken Klucznik            | 102,918     | MCC  | 134,550     | Assoc VP for Academic Affairs                        |
| Diane Bordonaro         | 82,455      | MxCC | 130,000     | Regional Workforce Development Officer               |
| Leslie Cropley          | 80,233      | COSC | 89,932      | Director of Project Management                       |
| Stephen Marcelynas      | 69,000      | SCSU | 107,610     | Director for the Office of Transfer and Articulation |
| Eileen Peltier          | 106,816     | ACC  | 150,632     | Regional Workforce Development Officer               |
| Kristina Testa Buzzee   | 95,000      | NCC  | 130,000     | Regional Workforce Development Officer               |
| Carrie McGee-Yuroff     | 135,199     | NCC  | 152,000     | Regional Finance Officer                             |
| Jenn Gray               | 94,699      | ACC  | 152,000     | Regional Finance Officer                             |
| Gennaro DeAngelis       | 134,916     | ACC  | 152,000     | Regional Finance Officer                             |
| Margaret Van Cott       | 62,000      | ACC  | 85,250      | Admin Assistant to Regional President                |
| Tanya Gibbs             | 52,764      | GCC  | 79,693      | Admin Assistant to Regional President                |
| Kimberly Sorrentino     | 67,795      | GCC  | 115,031     | Interim Director of Regional and Specialized Accred. |
| Diane Clokey            | 70,699      | ACC  | 87,916      | Interim Director of the Course Catalog               |
| Lori Angel              | 74,500      | TRCC | 86,298      | HR Data Specialist                                   |
| Mike Stefanowicz        | 71,877      | ACC  | 134,550     | Interim Assoc VP of Higher Education Transitions     |
| Marlene Cordero         | 86,894      | SCSU | 98,739      | HRSS Regional HR Manager                             |
| Tanya Millner           | 111,839     | MCC  | 155,250     | Interim Assoc VP of Teaching and Learning            |
| Theresa Eisenbach       | 95,400      | HCC  | 120,600     | Direction of Recruitment and Talent Acquisition      |
| Debra Freund            | 117,050     | MCC  | 121,509     | Manager of Diversity and Inclusion                   |